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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0089
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000653

SIPDIS

STATE DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [ASEC](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN ARRESTS MUSLIM MISSIONARIES: ARE THEY
EXTREMISTS?

REF: 2009 DUSHANBE 95

CLASSIFIED BY: NECIA QUAST, CHARGE D'AFFAIRS, EXE, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In April and May 2009, Tajik law enforcement officials arrested members of the Jamoat-i-Tabligh, a Sunni missionary group. Most of those arrested have been released, but an unknown number remain in custody, and it is unclear when or if criminal proceedings will be initiated against them. The manner in which government officials have approached the Tabligh group has led to cynical speculation that the government is attempting to divert attention from unpopular policies. It is more likely, however, that this is an example of a poorly executed law enforcement strategy. End Summary.

MASS ARRESTS

¶2. (U) Media outlets have reported that in April and May 2009, Tajik law enforcement officials in Dushanbe and Khatlon Province arrested up to 200 members of the Jamoat-i-Tabligh, a Sunni missionary group, and confiscated books and other literature calling for an Islamic state. Jamoat-i-Tabligh has been outlawed in other Central Asian countries, but until recently, the group had little or no profile in Tajikistan. An Interior Ministry spokesman, Mahmadali Asadulloev, told reporters that "like Hizb-ut-Tahrir, they have one main aim -- taking over the government and creating an Islamic caliphate." Officials have claimed that the organization was placed on a list of extremist groups in 2006, justifying the arrests.

¶3. (SBU) The arrests appear to have taken place over a period of weeks, and Muhammedjon Khayrulloev, from the General Prosecutor's Office, told reporters that those arrested would be criminally charged with "engaging in illegal religious activity." However, Tajik officials have been very vague about the numbers of people arrested, the circumstances surrounding the arrests, and when criminal proceedings would be instituted. Most appear to have been released soon after their arrests; government officials have acknowledged that four remain in detention. Tabligh members have claimed that the number still in detention is much higher (at least ten).

14. (C) Mullo Abdughani, a Tabligh member, told EmbOff that in April, security personnel arrested about a hundred members of the organization who had gathered at the Umari Foruq mosque in Dushanbe. Security personnel interviewed each Tabligh member individually, asking them from where they received funding, and telling them they needed to shave their beards. Abdughani estimated that there were 3,000 Tabligh adherents in Tajikistan, and that those who were arrested were primarily from Kulyob.

15. (C) An Embassy contact who works for the government and who knows a State Committee for National Security officer involved in the April arrests of 124 Tabligh members in Khatlon told us committee officials had infiltrated the group and posed as missionaries for about a year. In February 2009, two Chechens joined the Tabligh group and told other members that they had come to Tajikistan to fight against the government.

THE FLAVOR OF THE MONTH

16. (U) Local and international journalists have viewed the government's claims skeptically. Forum 18, a news service based in Norway, wrote that an official from the Ministry of Culture's Department of Religious Affairs "could not say what exactly was wrong in the actions of Jamaat Tabligh followers." Radio Liberty commented on May 14 that Tajiks have "become accustomed

DUSHANBE 00000653 002 OF 002

to authorities periodically singling out outlawed groups and launching a highly publicized campaign against it." On May 15, a court in Khujand convicted seven men of being members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir and inciting religious hatred. The government banned the Salafis earlier this year, claiming they threatened national unity and stability (reftel). No Salafi has been arrested, however.

17. (C) Comment: The government frequently cracks down on religious groups, Muslim or otherwise, particularly those engaged in missionary activity or those perceived to be a foreign influence. It is likely that the government moved against Tabligh because embedded security agents identified Chechens affiliated with the group. The security officials probably suspected the Chechens were using the group as a cover, or as a means to incite trouble, and Tajik officials cast a wide net in arresting and questioning known Tabligh members. Government secrecy surrounding the arrests, however, has led many to speculate that officials are simply drumming up ways to focus attention away from a deteriorating economic situation, or to justify a restrictive religious policy. While the government may have seen a legitimate security threat with the Tabligh group, its tactics undermined its credibility. End comment.
QUAST